

The Imaging Word

Toward a Theology of Preaching

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Writing is like giving birth: we cannot help making the supreme effort.
But we also act in like fashion. I need have no fear of not making the
supreme effort—provided only that I am honest with myself and that I pay
attention.

--Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

The project of writing, and writing creatively, is a painful birthing process. I've come to see that in a new way with this thesis. Thankfully, I have been blessed by the support and encouragement of my wife, Rebecca, who suffered through the strain of writing alongside me. I owe her more than words can express. I am indebted to her sincere and persistent prodding along with her enduring faith in my abilities as a writer and student. Our relationship has been tested and, I trust, strengthened by this project.

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Introduction

H. Richard Niebuhr was right to point out “that we are far more image-making and image-using creatures than we usually think ourselves to be.”¹ Preaching, too, is far more image-making and image-using than we usually think it to be. Recently, philosophers, theologians and homileticians have explored the image-character of words and stories in preaching, that is, their ability to draw in the hearers by presenting a new world to be inhabited and enacted.² But few have considered, at length, preachers and hearers in terms of the image of God. Fewer still have considered preaching itself as the imaging of God.³ Yet this is precisely what I aim to consider by asking: what light might be shed on preaching if the image of God were the key to understanding it?⁴ I contend that, in so far as the Word of God is the *raison d'être* of preaching,⁵ true and faithful preaching can be nothing other than an imaging of God. I argue that preaching is the imaging of God because it proclaims the Word, the divine image of God, which imaged human creatures at the dawn of creation and, incarnate in Christ Jesus, images human creatures still. Preachers and hearers meet in the preaching event as images of God to behold the imaging Word.

¹ *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 151.

² Walter Brueggemann, drawing on Paul Ricoeur's famous dictum, “the symbol gives rise to thought,” argues that “the image gives rise to a new world of possibilities,’ and the preaching for which I contend is aimed at the image-making out of the text that may give rise to a church of new obedience.” See *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 30.

³ Marjorie Suchocki offers a “Trinitarian” read of the image of God in relation to the work of preaching. See *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 19 – 21.

⁴ This question is inspired by Kathryn Tanner when she writes: “What light might be thrown on the well-worn idea that humans are created in the image of God, if Christ were the key to understanding it?” See *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

⁵ John McClure, “Word of God” in *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 153.

In what follows, I begin to unpack the nature and task of preaching with the symbol of image of God. We can explore preaching, as Tom Long suggests, by turning to the four constitutive features of the “preaching event”: 1) the assembly or congregation, 2) the preacher, 3) the sermon, and 4) the presence of Christ.⁶ Long asserts that we can refract an inquiry into preaching through any one of these features. He selects “the preacher,” attempting to comprehensively describe who the preacher is and what the preacher does, while claiming that, “we will necessarily also describe all the other relationships and dimensions of preaching.”⁷

I take a different track. Instead of focusing squarely on the preacher, I turn to the presence of Christ in the preaching event as the “way in” to an understanding preaching. If we understand what Christ's presence is doing in preaching, then we will have a clearer sense of how preaching can be a faithful and fitting response. In other words, the work of Christ is the cue for the human aim of preaching. Thus, I turn first to Kathryn Tanner's account of the image of God to discern the way in which preaching can faithfully respond to the presence of Christ in preaching. Her account uncovers the formative dynamic of Christ's presence as the incarnate, divine image of God. Human creatures, made in and after that divine image, are open to being trans-formed and re-formed and, moreover are constantly forming themselves, for better or worse, as they live. Christ's presence works to reform human creatures so that they can flourish by properly imaging God.

Having isolated this formative dynamic, I move, second, to preaching. I argue that preaching in the presence of Christ is aimed at forming all who gather and the whole community into the image of God. This is achieved by training attention on the divine image, incarnate in

⁶ Tom Long, drawing on Jürgen Moltmann, briefly unpacks each of these features in *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 15 – 17.

⁷ *Ibid*, 18

Christ, and cultivating responsiveness. While the scope of this inquiry prevents explicit, detailed elaboration on the other dimensions of the preaching event, there are rich implications for how the preacher and the congregation and the sermon can be understood with respect to the “image of God.” Preaching becomes a “fit dwelling”⁸ for the presence of Christ when it holds up the divine image of God so that, through the power of the Spirit, all who gather can work to image God. Through the sermon, a preacher aims to enliven the imaging Word.

⁸I borrow this phrase from Tom Long. See *The Witness of Preaching*, 17.

Imago Dei: Plasticity and Trans-formation

It is the task of each century to elaborate its theological thought ever anew on the basis of that indestructible symbol [the image of God] which henceforth belongs to the immutable treasury of the biblical canon.

Paul Ricoeur

“‘The Image of God’ and the Epic of Man”

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...

Genesis 1:26

The *imago Dei* is anything but a novel path for exploring the relation between God and human beings. Though the phrase “image of God” is found only three times in the Hebrew Bible, and all in the early chapters of Genesis, early Christian theologians fixed upon it time and again. One reason for this, F. LeRon Shults suggests, is that “the New Testament applies the phrase to Jesus Christ, the focus of the Christian faith; Jesus *is* the image of God, and the ultimate reality and possibility of human being require sharing in his life.”⁹ For just this reason Kathryn Tanner returns to the “well-worn” symbol of theological anthropology. She hopes to shed new light on the notion of the image of God with Christ as “the key to understanding it.”¹⁰ She visits many historic voices of the Christian faith tradition—such as Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Thomas Aquinas—weaving together a complex theological interpretation of the *imago Dei* with the help of their insights. Even so, Tanner’s novel conclusions show the truth of Paul Ricoeur’s observation that “the theologians of the sacerdotal school” were certainly not able to master the *imago Dei* and “all its implicit wealth of meaning.”¹¹

⁹ *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 220.

¹⁰ *Christ the Key*, 1.

¹¹ “‘The Image of God’ and the Epic of Man,” in *History and Truth*, 110.

Tanner begins by noting that, “What humans are thought to image—God, the trinity, or the Word—determines in great part whether theologians focus primarily on human nature in and of itself as the image of God.”¹² Tanner avoids *starting* with an investigation of human nature in itself. She will return to explore the distinctive features of human existence only after a detour through the story of creation, fall and redemption. Thus, she moves forward by probing a prospective reading of the Genesis passage in the trajectory of some early church theologians. On this interpretation, “Humans are not simply said to be the image in Genesis 1:27 but to be made ‘in’ or ‘after’ or ‘according to’ it, because the image primarily being referred to here is a divine one and not a human one at all. The kind of relationship that human beings have to that divine image is not specified by the passages; at best it would seem to involve a secondary image of this image.”¹³

A long line of interpreters have insinuated or stated that the *imago Dei* is primarily something about human beings themselves—be it a feature of human existence like rationality or relationality.¹⁴ A prospective reading of Genesis, however, places the image of God outside the human realm altogether. For all the exegetical difficulties this interpretation may present,¹⁵ theological attention is given to the image in an “intra-trinitarian” sense: “The image most

¹² Christ the Key, 1.

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ For a review of “substantialistic” and “relational” conceptions of the *imago Dei*, see Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1986), 89-108.

¹⁵ Tanner admits as much when she says “Whatever its merits as biblical exegesis, its theological import holds great promise.” For an example of the tension between a theological and an exegetical interpretation of Genesis, see Phyllis A. Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them: Genesis 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 74:2 (1981, 129-159. In this article, Bird takes on Karl Barth’s “theological interpretation” of Genesis 1:27b, “male and female he created them,” to show how his conclusions do not measure up to modern historical-critical exegesis. For a sympathetic though critical exploration of Barth’s theological approach to biblical interpretation, see David F. Ford, *Barth and God’s Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1985), especially 105-24.

properly speaking *just is* the second person of the trinity, the perfect manifestation of all that the first person is.”¹⁶ The second person of the Trinity, the Word or Wisdom, which will become incarnate in Christ, perfectly images God. The perfection of the divine image consists in the fact that the “second person of the trinity does not in any sense borrow from the first what it does not have of itself.”¹⁷

Humans, as earthly creatures, do borrow their existence from God. As a result, if they image God at all, they cannot possibly do so in the way the second person of the Trinity does. Tanner suggests humans do image God, but only in a secondary way, “by participating in what they are not—God.”¹⁸ Such participatory imaging, however distant from the perfect imaging of the Word, occurs in two distinct modes. Tanner distinguishes between (1) a “weak” or “general” image and (2) a “strong” image.

The first, or “weak,” way humans image God is simply as a creature of God. All creatures, not just humans, derive their life, their existence, from what they are not: God. “God is,” Tanner elaborates, “life itself, while everything else receives its life from God, without simply being it in and of itself. Any creature therefore has life in some degree or fashion and can lose it.”¹⁹ Even here, this general creaturely imaging is not of God “in general” or the “entire trinity,” but “the second person of the trinity in particular.”²⁰ The Word of God is where the plan and paradigm for all creation resides, and so creaturely imaging must be of this divine image.

Within the “weak” sense of image, attention may return to creatures themselves in order

¹⁶ *Christ the Key*, 6

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

to make distinctions among them, so long as a creature's derived existence is kept in view. Thus, certain human features, like rationality and volition, enable humans to be distinguished as "more" the image of God than other creatures.²¹ Still, as the *weak* image, the ontological difference between God and creatures is emphasized.

The second, or "strong," image of God results in a divine bridging of the difference between God and creatures. Still participating in God, creatures "receive the divine image itself for their own, and end the futile struggle, so to speak, to approximate God in and through what they are simply in themselves."²² Succinctly stated: "Rather than being in themselves merely similar to what God is in some full and perfect fashion beyond their reach [weak image], they would share in, hold in common with God, what is and remains itself divine, the perfect divine image itself [strong image]."²³ The difference, then, between the weak and strong image of God is not whether a creature is participating in God's life. Both modes of imaging are "borrowed" forms of life in which a difference between God and creatures is maintained. The strong image is the result of participatory *attachment* to the divine image. In attachment, creatures are doing more than borrowing existence, they are living off of God's life like "an unborn baby lives off of its mother, living in, with, and through her very life."²⁴ Here, however, humans are distinct in that, unlike other creatures which might simply reflect the life of the divine image and remain what they are, the character or identity of humans is reworked when the divine image is

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

impressed upon them.²⁵

It is important to pause and unpack what this means. Human identity is changed by strong imaging in that there is a formative impact of the divine image upon human existence. To see more clearly what's going on here, we might distinguish between a weak₁ image and a weak₂ image, though these are not Tanner's terms. The weakest form of imaging, weak₁ image, is simply the state of creaturely "borrowed" existence. As mentioned before, humans might be *more of* a weak₁ image than other creatures because of certain features, like reason. But such features can never be exercised so that humans become, on their own, *more than* a weak₁ image. The divine image is what affects a change from weak₁ imaging to the strongest form of weak participation in God, weak₂ imaging. For example, human reason, a created human capacity, can be formed and shaped in imitation of the divine image producing an excellence of human reasoning in "goodness and truth."²⁶ The divine image provides for the excellent functioning of humanly created capacities by forming them to itself.

Yet, for all its affective power, the divine image does not make the human creature *into* the divine image; weak₂ imaging is still *weak* imaging: "This refashioning [weak₂ imaging] is not the divine image per se but specifically human perfection, and as such still forms only a dim analogue of divinity."²⁷ The "inferior medium" of creaturely existence is simply not able to handle the abundant goodness God communicates to it: "the divine simply cannot be imitated very well in what is not divine."²⁸

Sorting this out in terms of the "Word" and "Spirit" takes the following shape: If the

²⁵ *Ibid*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 35.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

Word, as the divine image, is that which attaches itself to creatures and thereby establishes strong imaging; the Spirit is that power of transformation in which the weak₁ image is “made over” into the stronger weak₂ image. Creatures can never *be* the divine image, but attachment to the divine image, the Word, enables the creature, through the power of the Spirit, to be conformed to the divine image—to live off the life of God as “branches living off the alien sap of the vine to which they have been grafted.”²⁹ In other words, the Spirit is that power communicating to human creatures “the Word’s own goodness and truth that allows [human capacities] to be exercised excellently.”³⁰ Weak₂ imaging is imitation of the Word, by the power of the Spirit, working toward the most excellent state of creaturely existence possible.

Jesus Christ shows what strong imaging looks like: he is, as Tanner asserts, the paradigm for it. The Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, assumes the humanity of Jesus in such a way that Jesus has for himself the divine image: “through unity with what is not human—the second person of the trinity—the human being, Jesus, is the perfect human image of God.”³¹ No creature, human or otherwise, can perfectly participate in the divine image as Jesus does on his own. Still, Jesus, as a paradigm, reveals that creatures image God in a strong sense only when they “cling” to the Word of God rather than “trying harder” to image God in a created way all by themselves. Humans become the strong image only by “drawing near to the divine image, so near as to become one with it.”³²

We can return, then, to the prospective reading of Genesis which opened this theological journey. On the traditional account, humans are considered only an image of God in the weakest

²⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

³¹ *Ibid*, 13.

³² *Ibid*.

sense at creation: weak₁ imaging. The strong sense of the imaging comes through the incarnation and, therefore, so too does weak₂ imaging. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ is not only the paradigm for unity with the divine image, but also the means. In the hypostatic union, Jesus' humanity is assumed by the Word such that the Word is proper to and one with his humanity. By connection to Jesus's humanity, then, human creatures gain an attachment to the Word, they are able to "draw near to it." Only then, for the first time, are human creatures able to image God in the strong sense. Tanner brings in the Spirit to cement the point: "By the power of the Holy Spirit, the first person of the trinity sends the second person into the world so as to be incarnate in human flesh, one with the humanity of Jesus. That same power of the Spirit comes to us through the glorified humanity of Christ in order to attach us to him, make us one with him, in all the intensity of faith, hope, and love."³³

While Tanner began her inquiry by exploring this traditional prospective reading, presented through theologians of the early church, she suggests an alternative approach; one that she believes more emphatically catches how crucial Christ is for the human imaging of God. Tanner agrees with those who gave a prospective reading that the primary referent of the image in Genesis 1:26-7 is the Word, the divine image. Humans creatures are secondary images with the possibility of weak₁, weak₂, and strong imaging. But unlike the prospective account, she proposes that the Word and Spirit were gifts of God present from the very beginning, from the dawning of creation: "In creating us, God would not deny us the gift of his own divine image; boundlessly generous, God would not withhold from us the best gift of all—the divine image itself."³⁴ As with the prospective account, creatures were weak₁ images at creation "in having,

³³ *Ibid*, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

for example, a rational nature, a nature formless in and of itself without illumination from the light of the divine image.” But unlike the prospective account, Tanner’s reading highlights that “at their creation [humans] were turned by God to God’s own light—the Word—and gained thereby their human perfection.”³⁵ Humans were not just formlessly intelligent or rational creatures in the Garden of Eden. They also “enjoyed goodness, wisdom, and happiness” which could only happen if they “participated in the very goodness, wisdom and blessedness of God at their creation” through the “very presence of God to them.”³⁶ The Word of God, the divine image, was given over to human creatures for their own such that created human life was lived in a state of blessedness.

Thus, with the presence of the Word at creation, humans were “images of the strong sort in virtue of our attachment to the divine image itself, a divine image that in imprinting itself upon our minds and thereby making us wise produced in us a very strong image of the weak sort, human life made over according to the Word’s own wisdom in imitation of it.”³⁷ The weak₁ human image, made over into the weak₂ image by the diving image, indicates the presence of the Spirit at creation. Accordingly, we read in Genesis that the Spirit hovered over the waters (1:2) and was breathed into the lungs of Adam (2:7). “The Spirit was dispensed by the Word before the incarnation in at least some insecure and temporary fashion.”³⁸

In sum, for Tanner, humans image God in both the weak and strong sense at creation through the gift of Word and Spirit. This move hinges, for Tanner, on Christ as “the key” to decoding how humans are the image of God: “if one assumes that what humanity enjoys in

³⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 26.

Christ is the key to what happened then, we must at our creation have had the divine image for our own and been formed into it in something like the way the humanity of Jesus was and in much the way our own humanity is by way of him—through the Spirit.”³⁹ Humans must have been created to enjoy the Word and Spirit as their own, and could only do so if such gifts were bestowed on them at creation.

As a result of this reading, human nature in all its distinctiveness cannot be treated with isolated attention as if it were properly self-contained. Human faculties “were made to operate as they should, to operate well, only when incorporating what remains alien to them, the very perfection of Word and Spirit themselves.”⁴⁰ For Tanner, the gifts of Word and Spirit are “natural to” humans, even if human nature does not “possess” these gifts in itself.⁴¹ In this way, Word and Spirit are “pre-requisites” for the excellent functioning of distinctively human faculties. They are “ingredients” in the constitution of human beings “in ways that make human beings the image of God as other creatures are not.”⁴²

Tanner has established on her interpretation that, at creation, humans imaged God in the strong and weak senses. But, in moving to the fall and redemption, she uncovers something else about humans as secondary images of God. Humans lost the gifts of Word and Spirit as a consequence of sin. Thus, Word and Spirit “need to be restored to humanity by Christ in some

³⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 28.

⁴¹ In a later exploration of nature and grace, Tanner suggests the distinction between “natural to” humans and “what is human by nature.” Alluding to the discussion of the *imago Dei*, she writes that “grace in the form of God’s presence to us remains natural to us in that our nature has not been made to exist on its own apart from it. The grace of strong participation in God is natural to us because our nature is such that we exist well only with it... life without it must be an unnatural condition, a condition contrary to the character of our created nature....” See 129 – 130.

⁴² *Ibid*, 28.

new way that improves upon the original situation that permitted their loss.”⁴³ The Word and Spirit, present at creation but lost in sin, are returned to humanity in Jesus, making the work of Jesus all the more glorious. But how were those gifts first lost?

Humans were initially “immature” in their reception of the Word. They were unable to image God in the “strongest possible fashion,” i.e. in an irrevocable way.⁴⁴ Since the Word and Spirit were given to humanity from the very beginning as their own, in immaturity humans treated these gifts as though not from God at all. Humans, in imitating the divine, mis-took God’s gifts as simply and only their own: “The very way in which one naturally lives according to the image of God when one has been created from the first with it and is thereby immature—with ingratitude, lassitude, and pride before God—is so serious a distortion of imaging through human imitation that one might as well not be said to be an image at all.”⁴⁵ We might say, then, that distorted weak₂ imaging was the first human response to God’s gifts of Word and Spirit, and resulted instantly in “blindness to God’s presence.”⁴⁶ Humans closed themselves off from the divine image, thereby only intensifying the distortion. Consequently, “All that is left is a weak image in the weakest sense—human capacities themselves as the image of God without the divine Spirit of the Word’s own goodness and truth that allows them to be exercised excellently.”⁴⁷ Sin leaves humans mere weak₁ images of God.

Human sin revealed that the Word and Spirit were initially susceptible to loss. The strong form of participation and its formational power on the weak image were not irrevocably

⁴³ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

secured.⁴⁸ Redemption, then, was the conquering of that created susceptibility by establishing the “perfect beginning that in a sense never was.”⁴⁹ This is why Jesus Christ, as the Word incarnate, does not have the divine image as his own as other creatures do. At creation, “the divine image of the Word was simply foreign to us, even when we were being made over into it through the gift of the Spirit.”⁵⁰ But for Christ, the Word is not an “alien” gift from God. He just *is* the Word, the divine image; and in this way he has it as his own. Thus, the Spirit of God is properly his as well, enabling him to give to his humanity “what is his by nature.”⁵¹ Unlike humans at creation, the humanity of Jesus “can neither exhibit the divine image in an imperfect way nor lose it.”⁵² Since, in Christ, the Word has assumed humanity to be its own, “the Word has become in a sense proper to us, for all the difference in nature that remains between divine and human.”⁵³

By attachment to Christ, by sharing in his humanity assumed by the Word and formed perfectly in the Spirit, humans can *again* image God in the strong sense and thereby be formed by the divine image; though now in a *new* way through Christ. While that formation, or weak₂ imaging, is subject to the “frailty” of human weaknesses and faults, Christ remains “our unshakeable hope.” For in Christ, perfect human imaging of the divine is achieved: “in and with him it might confidently be ours, so that we need no longer fear its loss.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

While the story Tanner recounts emphasizes the strong and weak₂ forms of imaging by participation, these “stronger forms of participation and imaging are obviously bound up with the weakest one.”⁵⁵ A human creature cannot receive the presence of God, the divine image, as something she is not, unless she exists as something herself. Moreover, there must be something about the human creature, her “human nature,” that enables the distinctively human weak₂ form of imaging: “Certain human qualities or capacities that make up the created nature of humans and that therefore image God in the weakest sense must provide the opening for the divine image itself to become their own, present within them, in a way that reforms their humanity according to and in strong imitation of itself.”⁵⁶ Tanner, having traced out the story of creation, fall, and redemption in Christ, only then returns to creaturely existence so as to ask about the features of human existence which make such a story possible. How is it that humans can receive the divine image and be transformed by it through imitation?

Tanner isolates several features of human existence that enable the story of imaging sketched above. First, human nature is characterized by “expansive openness” to what is good.⁵⁷ If the presence of the divine makes humans “grow,” then humans must be “expandable.” Moreover, such expandability must be of an unlimited sort: “For the infinite being and goodness of God to come within them they must have the capacity to expand in their own created goodness without end.”⁵⁸

Second, to become a human imitation of the divine image, in weak₂ imaging, humans must also be mutable in character. Moreover, such changeability must also be “susceptible to

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 38.

radical transformation beyond the limits of their own [human] –or any—created nature.”⁵⁹

While no living creature is self-sufficient or self-contained—all depend on exterior inputs for proper functioning—humans are so in a distinctive way. Other creatures only change into “more” of what they are—growing larger in their natures. Humans are the kinds of creatures who do not have any initial limits on what they can become. Humans have a capacity “in some strong sense to become other things.”⁶⁰ The key notion, for Tanner, is “plasticity.” Humans are generally susceptible to being shaped and molded from outside influences, and can also become other than themselves in conformity to such influences.

Tanner sees the language of “image” as appropriate to the insight that humans are the kinds of creatures who take their identities from the uses to which they put themselves. Like “soft wax that a vast variety of seals might indent to their image,” humans tend to become that upon which they fix their gaze. Such an account need not be purely “passive,” as if humans do not have free will and are merely determined by whatever comes before them. Decisions made in freedom create “impressions” on human identity such that the “entrance of free will into the process only adds to the plastic, shape-shifting character of human nature.”⁶¹

In making decisions, humans differentiate themselves from their environments by focusing attention on objects of special concern. But the expenditure of effort in such attention produces an emotional or affective re-attachment that draws humans into a chosen object. This movement “into” the object is the result of self-reflective powers at work in a project of “self-

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 45.

fashioning and refashioning.”⁶² In the end, Tanner suggests that the self-formative capacities of humans “have no particular nature to be true to.”⁶³ Thus, “to be determined by human nature means to be determined by the open-ended nature of human reason and will, and therefore not to be determined to choose any one thing.”⁶⁴ What humans end up choosing as most important to them is what “decides in great part the character of their lives, the identity they come to exhibit in their acts.”⁶⁵

The reason Tanner and other theologians turn so often to faculties associated with reason, like rational volition, is because they demonstrate so vividly the “excessive openness of what exceeds their own or any limited nature.”⁶⁶ Powers of self-direction allow humans to imitate almost anything. But these faculties do not exhaust the plasticity of human creatureliness. For Tanner, “human beings form themselves with reference to a whole host of outside influences—people, places, animate and inanimate influences, etc—and what is formed is their whole lives, irrespective of any division between the material and spiritual.”⁶⁷ The body and soul, the whole human person is essential to the image of God on this account.⁶⁸

This opens humans “to everything intelligible and good.” There is room, so to speak, for

⁶² *Ibid*, 46.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 48.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 51.

⁶⁸ Tanner’s account avoids the critique of J. Richard Middleton who laments the continuing theological blindness to the “body” in interpretations of the *imago Dei*. As a biblical scholar, he argues the *imago Dei* is too often ripped from its biblical context for theological argumentation. He points to the bodily elements in the semantic range of *tselem*, the Hebrew word for image. See “The Liberating Image? Interpreting the Imago Dei in Context” in *Christian Scholars Review* 24.1 (1994), 8-25.

God. In being made in and after the image of God, humans are “determined to God: being formed in the image of God is their good by nature.”⁶⁹ But since God is an absolute good, not a limited one, humans are images of God in the weak₁ sense as those who have no particular nature. Failure to have a specific human nature is the result of “an excessive interest in, even love for, the unlimited. Humans seem to have an underlying concern for what is absolutely good per se—God—for what is not merely good in certain respects but fully good in a perfectly unlimited way.”⁷⁰ Humans incline to be the absolute good, rather than just any particular object, through formation in a relationship with it.

Thus, Tanner concludes that human openness to transformation is, in itself, an image of God; that is, an image “considered apart from what happens to humanity through incorporation of the divine image.”⁷¹ Humans image the infinite, unboundedly *full* God by having an unbounded, unlimitedly *lacking* nature. The incomprehensibility of God’s absolute fullness and inclusiveness is imitated in a “negative and prospective way.”⁷² Thus, humans are an image of the incomprehensible God in their own plasticity and expansiveness. They are “an incomprehensible image of the incomprehensible.”⁷³

In sum, Tanner’s account of the image of God focuses on the changeability, or vulnerability to what is outside and other, that enables human creatures to receive and live according to God. This plasticity or vulnerability is ambiguous in that it can be shaped by sinful

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 49.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 52.

⁷² *Ibid*, 53.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 54.

influences and result in de-formed lives. And yet this essential changeability also secures the hope of transformation and reformation by the power of Christ's spirit working upon human creatures. Human creatures do not lose their agency, they are not entirely passive. Human creatures form themselves. But what they form themselves *with* is what makes them who they are. When human creatures form themselves by the power of Christ's Spirit in accord with the divine image embodied in Jesus Christ, what emerges, however slowly, is a finally and distinctively a life that is *in Christ*. The image of God is a symbol that emphasizes the importance of human formation ending in the pattern of Christ.

Preaching and the Imaging Word

The proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, but rather it is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the word.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Worldly Preaching

Preaching is driven by the Word of God. The Word is the *raison d'être* of preaching.⁷⁴

The Word is not locked in the immanent Trinity apart from human existence. Nor is the Word a frozen museum piece in the archives of human history; it is not a dormant Word. The Word is not dead, lifeless and unable to make a difference in human existence. No, the Word which spoke creation and human creatures into existence was incarnate in Christ so as to bear on human life anew—that is, not just once, but always. Though crucified, the resurrected Christ secures the Word for the present and the future: the Word is at work still. Thus, preaching, as driven by the Word, implies that humans are not the only agents involved in preaching. “Preaching,” Long notes, “is a human activity but not merely a human activity.”⁷⁵ Preaching performed “in Christ’s name” is not meant as an assertion of divine authority for the human preacher, but a recognition that preaching cannot be reduced to a human activity alone. Preaching in “Christ’s name” means “the risen Christ is truly present here and now.”⁷⁶ What makes preaching what it is is not the rhetorical finesse of a preacher nor the shouts of “Amen!” from the hearers. Preaching is what it is by the Word, present in Christ, working in and with the frail words of human speech as they are spoken and received. Preaching is an “audible sacrament” through which the Word continues

⁷⁴ John McClure, “Word of God” in *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 153.

⁷⁵ *The Witness of Preaching*, 16.

⁷⁶ *The Witness of Preaching*, 16.

to bear on human life through the presence of Christ.⁷⁷

Still, the presence of Christ does not guarantee that all preaching is good preaching. Human words neither *establish* nor control Christ's presence. Preaching is possible, in the first place, only because God has *already* promised to be present in Christ. Preaching emerges from that promise, attempting not to control Christ's presence, but to *respond* faithfully and fittingly to it. Yet, human words can, and too often do, fail to be faithful and fitting; becoming, instead, “trivial, destructive, or demonic.”⁷⁸ So, then, how do preachers struggle to resist the forces of trivialization, destruction, and demonization and remain faithful and fitting to Christ's presence?

By looking to the symbol of the image of God, we can discern what the presence of Christ is doing and working toward, and, consequently, what preachers should be doing and aiming for so as to enable a preaching in concert with Christ's presence. Preachers can responsibly shape their words with Christ's own goal in mind and thereby join in with the work of God in Christ. In this way, human words manage to become “fit dwellings” for the presence of Christ.⁷⁹ Preaching may be a “wild river, wide and deep,”⁸⁰ but it is going somewhere important. The current is our homiletical cue. Negotiating the dangers and difficulties of the river does not happen successfully without an understanding and feel for the current. Christ's presence propels preaching such that preaching can become what it is and head toward its destination only when preachers are swept up in the current of Christ, navigating around the rocks, over the falls, and through the bends with steady, intentional strokes that account for the

⁷⁷ Mary Catherine Hilkert uses this phrase to formulate Augustine's insight that sacraments are visible signs of an invisible reality. See *Naming Grace* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 192.

⁷⁸ *The Witness of Preaching*, 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *The Witness of Preaching*, 12.

changing flow of the river. Preachers do not become the current, they participate in it, respond to it, work within it, maneuvering in a distinctive way toward the open, bottomless ocean of God's abundant, blessed life.

The account of the image of God suggests that God is forming human creatures by the pattern of Christ, enabling humans to live individually and collectively as they were created to live: in a state of divine blessedness that is the excellent functioning of human life. Christ's presence is nothing other than Christ's unwavering attachment to human creatures in all their diversity of belief and unbelief, sin, finitude, and death. If Christ is present in preaching, then preaching which is driven by and faithful to that presence joins with Christ in forming human creatures into the images of God they are called to be, both as individuals and members of a wider community.

Tanner's account of the image of God highlights this formational dynamic in an important way. The presence of Christ, that is, Christ's attachment to our common humanity, provides all human creatures with the immediate gift of his Spirit. All human creatures can live excellently off the life of God by drawing on the power of Christ's Spirit and conforming themselves, in all their distinctiveness, to his image. Because the Word securely assumes our common humanity in Christ, his Spirit remains an unshakeable source with which to shape human life into the image of God. Yet, in spite of this, humans do not draw upon Christ's Spirit "automatically" or "mechanically." Instead, "the human consequences of this divine impression [the presence of the Holy Spirit]... unroll over time in a constant struggle against a sinful past and against the sinful impulses that always seem to remain within us despite the gifts of God's grace."⁸¹

Human life is a struggle to be formed rightly, to image God, because sin is also in the

⁸¹ *Christ the Key*, 89.

picture. Though all creatures are, in one sense, an image of God by virtue of being God's creatures, open to and longing for God, able to be transformed and reformed according to God's life in Jesus Christ; human creatures are also, in a second sense, struggling against the forces of sin to live into the perfect human image of God in the daily march of life. Humans, as they struggle to image God, can learn to cling more securely to Christ who has already attached himself to them. That clinging happens, ideally, through a "purity of attention, full commitment, and intense love."⁸² In other words, human life is a struggle to focus attention upon Christ's presence and commit to living lovingly according to him. Sin is a distraction and distortion of human attention—a lingering myopia. Human creatures, in sin, move toward other images, idols, stunting and crippling their imaging of God.

So, then, with Marjorie Suchocki, the image of God suggests that the proclaimed word is a word "which holds the image of Christ anew before the gathered people."⁸³ The presence of Christ not only makes preaching possible, it is what preaching is all about. Preaching is cultivating attention to the presence of Christ who is not only walking through the congregation, as Bonhoeffer asserts, but who is always present in human life—that is, not confined to sanctuary walls on a Sunday morning. Through preaching, we can attend to the Christ who is "present in the church, with the church, for the church, in the world, with the world, and for the world."⁸⁴ Tanner's metaphor is apt: the Word is present through Christ in all of human life, shining like the sun to creatures who too often close their eyes to him. Preaching in the presence of Christ aims to shape human life by opening up closed eyes and focusing myopic vision:

⁸² *Ibid*, 13.

⁸³ *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 20.

⁸⁴ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 16.

“God, give us ears to hear and *eyes to see*.”

Kay Northcutt is not far from this when she suggests that the aim of preaching is not persuasion, explanation, or communication, but formation. Preaching is not fundamentally eliciting grand decisions, making clear an obscure concept, or sharing relevant data—though these things might be involved in preaching at one point or another. Northcutt considers the proper aim of preaching to be spiritual formation as an “art of *shaping* attentiveness both to God and to God’s needs in the world.”⁸⁵ By fostering attention to the presence of God in Christ, human desire for God is kindled in the lives and collective ethos of a community, and the power of the Holy Spirit is unfurled to refashion human existence. For Northcutt, formation works toward the spiritual freedom of individuals and communities to discover God’s vocation, or purpose, for their lives in meeting the needs of the world and enacting God’s *shalom*. This vocation, on our terminology, is the distinctive shape of a person or community imaging God.

If the image of God is the key to understanding preaching, then preaching in the presence of Christ aims at trans-formation and re-formation of individuals and communities by strengthening *attention*. Preachers respond faithfully and fittingly to Christ’s presence when they bring the attention of the gathered community to the presence of Christ in their midst—not just in the sanctuary as preaching occurs, but in the entirety of life extending outside the time of worship and space of the church. By holding up the image of Christ, the preached word participates in the slow, sometimes painful work of formation. Preaching is a kind of teaching, the on-going training of attention so that the gathered assembly is prepared and strengthened to continue the life of imaging God. Attention requires continual effort and discipline.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Kindling Desire for God: Preaching as Spiritual Formation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 19

⁸⁶ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 1971), 36 – 7. I will explore Murdoch’s consideration of attention below.

But what is attention and how is it involved in preaching? How do we give effort to and discipline attention through preaching? We have discerned that preaching faithfully and fittingly in the presence of Christ is aimed at forming human creatures into the images of God. Preachers do not do the forming themselves, instead they cultivate the formative dynamics involved in the image of God by training individual and collective attention on the divine image, the Word of God, embodied in Christ. The hearers of a sermon form themselves with the power of Christ's Spirit by learning to continually attend to the image of Christ. Preaching trains the attention. In what follows, I will revisit the image of God and draw on the work of Simon Weil and Iris Murdoch to consider more carefully what attention is and how it can be cultivated and enacted in preaching.

Attention

Attention is a particular kind of looking. What we actually look upon, what we love and commit ourselves to, what we see as “really there,” forms and shapes us. Iris Murdoch suggests the word “looking” as a neutral term for the flow of psychic energy which shapes human action. She argues that choosing always occurs within what can be seen, in the moral sense of see.⁸⁷ Tanner adds a dimension of identity to this looking: humans “are the mirror of whatever it is upon which they gaze.”⁸⁸ The symbol of the image of God pictures human creatures as fundamentally plastic, changeable, vulnerable. What human creatures look upon, what they “see,” shapes how they act. And how they act forms their identity: humans “take their identities from the uses to which they put themselves.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *The Sovereignty of Good*, 36.

⁸⁸ *Christ the Key*, 44.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

The kind of looking that Murdoch refers to as attention is “a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality.”⁹⁰ Attention is a kind of moral perception in which the reality of the good is apprehended.⁹¹ The good is manifest in human beings and “individual realities of other kinds.”⁹² Moreover, the Good is attractive, magnetic, inexhaustible. It is really there, but “partakes of the infinite elusive character of reality.”⁹³

Tanner would see the goodness manifest in human beings and other realities as the goodness of God in them. God is the supreme reality as absolute being and goodness.⁹⁴ God is what attracts human creatures. She writes, humans “seem to have an underlying concern for what is absolutely good per se—for God—for what is not merely good in certain respects but fully good in a perfectly unlimited way.”⁹⁵ Despite this difference, for both thinkers, attention is a looking which focuses on the magnetic (attractive) and inexhaustible reality of what is good. There is a basic “desire” for the good. And so, as Simone Weil writes, “attention is bound up with desire.”⁹⁶ Attention focuses this desire on what is “authentic” to human existence: “truth, beauty, goodness.”⁹⁷

⁹⁰ *The Sovereignty of Good*, 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

⁹² *Ibid*, 37.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 41.

⁹⁴ William Schweiker takes on Murdoch's argument for “the Good” as a replacement for God, arguing that the symbol God serves not only to indicate the reality of the good but the goodness of reality. His argument attempts to account for the intrinsic worth that demands respect in “individual realities” as symbolized in the creative power of God and the incarnation: God, as the reality of the Good, has also bound Godself to reality. See “The Sovereignty of God's Goodness” in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, edited by maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 209-235.

⁹⁵ *Christ the Key*, 47.

⁹⁶ *Gravity and Grace* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 118

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 120.

For Tanner, human creatures desire what is true, beautiful, and good because God graciously gave Word and Spirit to human creatures at the dawn of creation. Humans were created to live off of God “since God is the absolute truth and goodness in its fullness.”⁹⁸ Humans distinctively live off God through their created capacities of reason and will functioning excellently by the gifts of Word and Spirit. These gifts give them “their positive inclination toward the universal—that is, an interest in principle in everything that may be good or intelligible—and their negative tendency to be dissatisfied with anything short of the total and complete truth or good.”⁹⁹

Unfortunately, the absolute being and goodness of God is not what human creatures spend most of their time looking upon. Murdoch writes, “Of course psychic energy flows, and more readily flows, into building up coherent but false pictures of the world, complete with systematic vocabulary.”¹⁰⁰ While determined to look upon and live off God's own life, sin is the perpetual impulse to look elsewhere—to build up “false pictures” or idols. Sin blinds human creatures to the divine image, God's own infinite and absolute goodness. Human life is riddled with idols, false images, which can, and often do, organize and shape human life.

Still, the human tendencies to incline toward the good and true and to remain dissatisfied with partial and incomplete truths or goods are not eliminated by sin. These tendencies do not ultimately issue from anything that is *inherent* to human creatures, and so cannot be eradicated by sinful human action. The Word never left human creatures; human creatures turned from the Word. So the Word continues to attract humans to God's goodness and truth by its magnetic

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ *The Sovereignty of Good*, 36.

presence. In other words, there lingers a God-given desire for what is good and true in human life despite sinfulness and the saturation of human vision with partial, incomplete, and distorted images masquerading as absolute goods. Thus, even while these images distort the fullness of reality and shape stunted lives, as partial and incomplete, they remain ultimately impotent to extinguish the insatiable appetite in human creatures for the absolute being and goodness of God. We are, even as distracted sinners, restless for God.¹⁰¹

Preaching, then, probes the restlessness of human existence to expose and free human creatures and communities from the partial and incomplete goods that stunt life. Northcutt refers to this as “spiritual freedom” whose *telos* or goal is the well-being of all.¹⁰² God's absolute goodness includes the well-being of all, the mutual fulfillment of all God's creatures.¹⁰³ The contours of daily life present pressures and problems which distract us from the image of God in Christ and the patterns of human living intended for us, which benefit *all*. “People,” writes Kathryn Tanner, “make a host of different fundamental decisions about what is most important to them—fancy cars, the respect of their peers, wisdom, and so on. They thereby attach themselves to these objects of desire and draw them into themselves, so to speak, as variable organizing principles of their lives.”¹⁰⁴ These moral and religious orientations retrace the character of human existence. Humans, without attention to the image of Christ, are quickly lead to “a cycle of work and spend and the constant wanting of acquisitiveness, doing, and having.”¹⁰⁵ Humans

¹⁰¹ In *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Book I, para. 1).

¹⁰² *Kindling Desire for God*, 56.

¹⁰³ See Tanner's *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 90.

¹⁰⁴ *Christ the Key*, 46.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

too often live merely “to please others or to fulfill others’ expectations.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, more overtly violent and destructive patterns of life—racism, (hetero-) sexism, and classism, to name but a few—also emerge when certain particular goods, like the “white race” or masculinity or economic status, are exalted as a supreme image. Humans deplete themselves and others.

Such pressures and problems are not unique to- but are compounded by- a “global media system” which “circulates an infinity of images of possible worlds and lives.” This reality “poses with new force an enduring moral challenge: given the explosion of the global imaginary, persons and communities must assess the images, symbols, and narratives that saturate consciousness and promote ideas about how to live.”¹⁰⁷ Preaching is how the community of the church wrestles with and assesses the images which impinge upon and shape human life. In attending to the “false images” and the patterns of living they engender, preaching works to release the lock such idols have in definitively and destructively forming human lives and the ethos of a community.

But attending to these “false images” *as false* comes by way of attention to what is absolutely true, good, and beautiful: the very being of God, the divine image, embodied and disclosed in Jesus Christ. False images, to be false, demand the contrast of the true image. Thus, persons and communities can be released from the array of idols which demean and destroy life only when the divine image of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, exposes their partial and incomplete status. “Attention,” writes Iris Murdoch, “is the attempt to counteract states of illusion.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 132.

¹⁰⁸ *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 36.

So while decisions for partial and incomplete goods inescapably shape human character, human creatures can shed the power of those images over their lives and work to reform themselves according to the divine image. The attraction of God's absolute goodness and being is more powerful than the idols which pervade the social imaginary. In turning our attention to Christ as the incarnate divine image of God, in seeing how Christ is already present and at work in the world, we are drawn into the divine image in the power of Christ's Spirit and empowered to become more of what God intends for us to be. Attention to Christ's ways of healing, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and peace draw human individuals and communities into the image he is by enabling humans and human communities to follow in his way with the power of his Spirit.

Preaching is about cultivating and nurturing desire for the divine image by way of training attention on the presence of Christ in our lives. Kay Northcutt writes that preaching should aim to form congregations toward the love and desire for God.¹⁰⁹ She goes on to argue that preaching develops a kind of "seeing" in which we see God's presence in "our neighbor's suffering" and *respond*.¹¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr puts it this way,

They know themselves to be Christians when they see their companions in need in the form of Christ... The needy companion is not wholly other than Christ, though he is not Christ himself. He is a Christo-morphic being, apprehended in the form of Christ, something like Christ, though another... Jesus Christ, too, is the symbolic figure with which he understands or apprehends the ultimate spirit that moves in the depths of his life and all of creation... Again Jesus Christ is the symbolic form with which the self understands itself, with the aid of which it guides and forms itself in its actions and sufferings.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Kindling Desire for God*, 17

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

¹¹¹ *The Responsible Self*, 154 – 6.

Preaching is about developing a “Christo-morphic” moral perception such that the presence of Christ can be discerned in all of life—including within oneself. Preaching aims to kindle desire for God by pointing out where God in Christ is present in the world: in the dignity and worth of all human creatures; in the struggle to resist suffering, exploitation, and oppression; in the celebration of achievements and success; in efforts to seek justice and love deeply. Preaching aims to help hearers see themselves as the images of God whose identity is secured in Christ so that they are empowered, with the help of the Spirit, to shape a life in accord with that understanding.

Yet, attention must be trained, cultivated, disciplined. Attention, as a clear vision of reality, “is a result of moral imagination and moral effort.”¹¹² More acutely, “The task of attention goes on all the time and at apparently empty and everyday moments we are 'looking,' making those little peering efforts of imagination which have such important cumulative results.”¹¹³ Attention is not merely a church activity; it is not something that happens only at church. Preaching aims to cultivate attention, to strengthen and nourish what we see so that we see what is really there *at all times*. Preaching points to what is really there and issues a challenge to look for it continually. If, as Simon Weil writes, truth, beauty, and goodness “in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same act, a certain application of the full attention to the object,” then preaching is a kind of teaching which “should have no aim but to prepare, by training the attention, for the possibility of such an act.”¹¹⁴

If preaching is about teaching attention, not just exhorting attention but embodying and

¹¹² *The Sovereignty of Good*, 36.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 42.

¹¹⁴ *Gravity and Grace*, 120.

cultivating it, then two important questions emerge for preaching that is faithful to the imaging Word: 1) “Where is Christ in this?” and 2) “who am I or who are we in Christ?”¹¹⁵ Preaching enlivens a Christo-morphic perception of one's neighbors; the needs, suffering and vulnerability in the world; and the daily demands of everyday life. Christ is sought out. But Preaching also enables a Christo-morphic self-perception. It cultivates a sense of self that is *in Christ* in word and deed.

Preaching is not a cookie-cutter endeavor, a one-size-fits all project. Attention and discernment walk together. The situations and circumstances of a congregation will present specific challenges and opportunities to see Christ present and working in the world. Preachers wrestle with biblical texts, current events, and human lives asking again and again: Where is Christ in this text for these people?” The sermon invites the responses: “Who shall I be in Christ?” and “Who shall we be in Christ?”

Preaching is part of the overall effort to train attention on the goodness of God through the presence of Christ in the world—that is, to see reality for what it is and act accordingly. When attention is attuned to the presence of Christ in the world, the images of God who gather and go forth from the preaching event are enabled to draw on the power of the spirit and form themselves into the images God calls them to be. When the proclaimed word presents the image of Christ before the congregation, attention can be retrained on what matters most; on what is good, beautiful, and true; on what brings life and flourishing to all; on what enables the imaging of God. Preaching the imaging Word is a response to the presence of Christ that forms human creatures and communities in the power of the Spirit to live distinctively with the shape of Christ.

¹¹⁵See *Christ the Key*, 105.

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